



Sermon-Based Study Guide
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Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church - July 10, 2011

Sermon Title: Dare to Cross the Bridge

Sermon Text: Hebrews 4.14 – 5.3

Related Texts: Leviticus 16.1-34; Romans 8.29-39

I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

Have you ever walked across the Golden Gate Bridge? If so, what was that experience like? If not, what do you imagine it being like?

II. Introduction

The Book of Hebrews is an amazing record of the Preacher/Author's concern for the Jewish Christians – mid-first century, Rome or Ephesus or some major city – who are experiencing discouragement and the constant pressure to abandon their trust in Jesus. In response, the writer presents Jesus as the full reflection of God's radiance, the exact imprint of God, the one true hope, and source of rest. He urges his readers to remain faithful, to strive to enter that rest, and to not abandon their trust in Jesus. Then, after emphasizing how God's word lays bare all thoughts and attitudes before God to whom we all must give an account, the author presents a reason for boldness and confidence – we have a sympathetic High Priest.

III. Study the Context – Read Hebrews 4.14-16

- 1) To what is the writer referring in verse 14 when he says "we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens...?" How does this set Jesus apart from any human high priest?
- 2) Citing "Jesus, the Son of God" in verse 14 relates back to Hebrews 1.3 where the divine nature of Jesus is emphasized. How does this emphasis help or motivate the Hebrews to "hold firmly to the faith we profess?" What is at the heart of that faith?
- 3) It will be helpful to look through Leviticus 16.1-34 to get an idea of the role and responsibility of Aaron as he was called to serve as the High Priest. What roles does he play with regard to the people? What roles does he play with regard to God? What must he do on his own behalf?

Note: The role of the High Priest is His role is like that of a bridge between God and people. It is a two-fold role. First, the priest represents God to the people by representing God's holy presence among them. The priest represents God's love, mercy, grace, and desire to relate to people. Second, the priest represents people to God by presenting their gifts, prayer, symbols of repentance, cares and deepest needs to God.

- 4) Where verse 14 focuses the reader on Jesus' divine nature, verse 15 describes Jesus full human nature. What is so significant about the nature of Jesus – fully divine and fully human when it comes to him being our High Priest?
- 5) Author Tom Long suggests that:
"Jesus embodied what God, in the creation, intended for human life (to be without sin). To say that Jesus is "without sin" is not to say he was 99 percent human – human in every way except for the fact he was without sin – but rather to affirm Jesus experienced the full ambiguity and uncertainty, the weakness and vulnerability, the temptation and sufferings of life without compromising his humanity, without straying from his call to be a human being."

What do you think of Long's statement? How do you envision Jesus right now – as a "perfect" human being? As a spiritual being?

- 6) Romans 8.29-39 includes a reference to Jesus interceding for us today in heaven. With this and with the description of Jesus as a sympathetic High Priest in Hebrews 4.15 in mind, look at verse 16. What confidence can you have in approaching God's "throne of grace?" What is promised to those who boldly approach God through Jesus the High Priest?

IV. Theological Reflection

It is important for us to be grounded in our theological understanding and this passage lends itself to deep theological reflection. The first concept we find in it is the act of the incarnation – Jesus being fully God taking on human form and becoming fully human as God intended for all human beings to be, characterized by being without sin. The Nicene Creed was written in order to clarify what the early Church believed about Jesus and stresses his full deity and full humanity. It is in his full humanity that Jesus serves as our High Priest today – able to sympathize with our struggles, temptations, and weakness – and serve as the bridge between us and God the Father and Spirit. In his ascension Jesus re-entered heaven as the fully human person he was. It follows that his resurrection body is in heaven and that Jesus, the Son continues to intercede for us, represent us to God, and represent God to us.

V. Apply It – Reflect and Respond

- 1) How does the description of Jesus in this passage help you boldly approach God?
- 2) When you pray do you ask boldly? Do you, as one person puts it, "offer audacious prayers?"
- 3) Tom Long says, "Bold audacious prayer is not a matter of technique, it is a matter of theological trust. The practice of prayer – bold, audacious – rests upon what we believe about God and God's relationship to us." If you believe Jesus is alive, intercedes for you, is able to sympathize with your weaknesses and temptations as we have seen, can you be bolder in prayer? Can you more confidently approach God's throne of grace even when it is to confess some vile ungodliness? Can you reach out for mercy and help with greater "audacity"?